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Address on Washington's Birthday

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DELIVERED ON FEBRUARY 22, 1918, AT WASHINGTON'S
BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION BEFORE THE SONS
AND DAUGHTERS OF THE REVOLUTION,
AT WASHINGTON, D. C.

By

HON. WARREN G. HARDING
UNITED STATES SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF OHIO



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ADDRESS ON WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY.

Mr. President, Madam President, Your Excellencies, Sons and Daughters of the Revolution, ladies and gentlemen, my countrymen, I have been sensing the atmosphere of this patriotic occasion and the significance of this celebration. There is an interesting suggestion in the representation here to-day which gives assurances of that fraternity of nations which is to hold justice and our ideals of civilization secure to the world.

Here, on my right, is the ambassador from Italy, whose people discovered us; on my left is the new ambassador from Great Britain, whose people largely developed us; and nearby sits the ambassador of France, whose people helped to deliver us, all joining us of America in a tribute to the beloved Father of the Republic, and consecrating all to the common cause of liberty and justice and the security of national life.

It is impossible to resist the impelling thought to speak as an eligible son of the Revolution and say what I know is in your hearts to these official representatives of the nations with whom we are committed in all conscience and righteousness.

To you, Mr. Ambassador, I pledge you America's sympathy and admiration, in the sacrifices made and the courageous battle which Italy is giving to our common enemy. And to you, Lord Reading, I utter what I know to be felt and yet little expressed, our reverent regard for Great Britain's unselfish and unalterable resolution to fight to the death for the sanctity of international compacts. And to you, Mr. Ambassador, I speak the love and admiration of America for noble and heroic France, who helped us establish the very liberty for which your sons are dying to-day. In such a fraternity as you and our own people make, I find the highest assurance mankind may have for the future security of the civilized world.

It is good to meet and drink at the fountains of wisdom inherited from the founding fathers of the Republic. It is a fitting time for retrospection and introspection when we face a problem to-day even greater than the miracle they wrought. The comparison does not belittle their accomplishment. Nothing in all history surpasses their achievement. The miracle was not the victory for independence. The stupendous thing was the successful establishment of the Republic. There they were, spent and bleeding, in the very chaos of newly found freedom; there they were, with ideas conflicting, interests varied, jealousies threatening, and selfishness impelling; there they were, without having visualized nationality. They had contended only for liberty, and when it was obtained they found a nation to be the necessary means of its preservation.

With commanding patriotism and lofty statesmanship, with heroic sacrifice and deep-penetrating foresight, they founded what we had

come to believe the first seemingly dependable popular Government on the face of the earth. I can believe they were divinely inspired. In the reverent retrospection I can believe that destiny impelled. Surely there was the guiding hand of divinity itself, conscious of sublime purpose.

They not only wrought union and concord out of division and discord, but they established a representative democracy, and for the first time in the history of the world wrote civil liberty into the fundamental law. On this civil liberty is builded the temple of human liberty, and through this representative Government we Americans have wrought to the astonishment of the world. More, on the unfailing foundation of civil liberty they established orderly government, the most precious possession of all civilization, and made justice its highest purpose.

Mark you, they were not reforming the world. They had dearly bought the freedom of a new people; they reared new standards of liberty; they consecrated themselves to equal rights, then sought to establish the highest guaranty of them all. They had the vision to realize that no dependable government could be founded on ephemeral popular opinion. They knew that thinking, intelligent, deliberate, public opinion, in due time would write any statute that justice inspired. They knew that no pure democracy, with political power measured by physical might, ever had endured; that neither the autocrat with usurped or granted power, or the mass in impassioned committal could maintain liberty and justice or bestow their limitless blessings. So they fashioned their triumphs, their hopes, their aspirations, and their convictions into the Constitution of the representative Republic; they made justice the crowning figure on the surpassing temple, and stationed beckoning opportunity at the door—equal opportunity, let me say—and bade the world to come and be welcome; and the world came—the down-trodden and the oppressed, the adventurous and ambitious—and they drank freely of the waters of our political life, and stood erect, and achieved, each according to his merits or his industry, his talents or his genius. Generous in their rejoicing, the fathers neglected to establish the altars of consecration at the threshold. Eager to develop our measureless resources, anxious to have humanity come and partake freely of new-world liberty, they asked no dedication at the portals. They developed an American soul in their own sacrifices for liberty, but neglected to demand soul consecration before participation on the part of those who came to share their triumphs.

We have come to realize the oversight now. We have come to find our boasted popular Government put to the crucial test in defending its national rights. We met with no such problem in the Civil War. That was a destined conflict between Americans of the two schools of political thought, which was the final test in maintaining nationality. There was like passion for country on either side of that great struggle, but the dross in the misdirected passion for disunion was burned away in the crucible of fire and blood, and the pure gold turned into shining stars in dear Old Glory again. We settled rights to nationality among ourselves. We are fighting to-day for the unalterable rights which are inherent in nationality, without which no self-respecting nation could hope to survive, and for which any nation refusing to fight does not deserve to survive.

There has never been one moment of doubt among Americans about the righteousness of our part in this unutterable war. There has never been any question among Americans about the necessity of our taking a mighty part therein. And there isn't any question among real, red-blooded Americans about our fighting it to a triumphant ending. It is not in my heart to utter a boast, and I am not so unheeding as to underrate the determination and the preparedness of the allied central powers. I do not misconstrue the loyalty of their peoples, against whom we do and must give battle, whether we proclaim it so or not, but this mightiest conflict of all time is one of resources and brains as well as valor and heroism, and America is rich in all, and her strength is doubled by the righteousness of our cause. We were slow in our committal, but it is unalterable. We do not seek to destroy, but Germany must be brought to terms. We do not cry for vengeance, but the madman of the world must be restrained or restored to reason. We do not mean to intrude or dictate any more than we mean to tolerate intrusion or dictation, but now that we are involved, we mean to make the world fit to live in, and hold America and all lawful avenues of commerce and comity safe for Americans on land or sea.

We have the duty to preserve the inherited covenant of the fathers; we have the obligation to hand on to succeeding generations the very Republic which we inherited. If this generation will not sacrifice and suffer in this crisis of the world, the Republic is doomed. If this fortunate people can not prove popular government capable of defense in a war for national rights, popular government fails. If the impudent assumption of world domination is not thwarted by the entente allies and this people, then civilization itself is defeated. Never since the world began has any nation been able to dominate the world. A mighty, righteous people may influence and help mankind, and I have wished that noble task for this Republic, but domination is for God alone, and His agency is the universal brotherhood of man.

There is one compensation in the very beginning. We are finding ourselves. From this day henceforth we are to be an American people in fact as well as name. Consecration to America is the deliberate and unalterable decree. The dedicating altars are erected and are free as liberty itself. Now and hereafter the individual, no matter who he is or whence he comes, who proclaims himself an American and fattens his existence on American opportunity, must be an American in his heart and soul. More, the American of to-day, to-morrow, and so long as the Republic endures and triumphs, must be schooled to the duties of citizenship which go with the privileges and advantages thereof, and men and women of America are to find what they can do for orderly government instead of seeking what it can do for them.

Solemnly, my countrymen, this is an epoch in human affairs. The world is in upheaval. There is more than war and its measureless cost. Civilization is in a fluid state. All existent forms of government are being tested, and the very fundamentals of human achievement are in question. In this hour of reverent memory for the beloved Father of our Country, in this wholesome retrospection of the miracle wrought by the founders, in the hurried contemplation of the

marvelous achievements of our people to whom they gave an immortal beginning, let us strive to appreciate their wisdom and our good fortune and commit ourselves anew to the essential preservation.

I wonder what the great Washington would utter in warning, in his passionate love of the Republic and his deep concern about future welfare, if he could know the drift of to-day? In his undying farewell address his repeated anxiety was concerning jealousies and heart-burnings which spring from distrust and factional misrepresentations—"they tend to rend alien to each other those who ought to be bound together by fraternal affection."

And he warned us that "respect for authority, compliance with its laws, acquiescence in its measures are duties enjoined by the fundamental maxims of true liberty." "Liberty itself will find in such a government, with powers properly distributed and adjusted, its surest guardian. It is, indeed, little less than a name where the government is too feeble to withstand the enterprises of faction * * * and to maintain all in the secure and tranquil enjoyment of rights and property."

Alluding to parties, more comparable to factions in our citizenship of the present day, he warned against "the spirit having its root in the strongest passions of the human mind. It exists in all governments, more or less stifled, controlled or repressed, but in those of popular form it is seen in its greatest rankness and is truly their worst enemy."

In our mighty development we have added to the perils of which Washington warned. The danger has not been in party association, but in party appeal or surrender to faction. There has been no partisan politics in our war preparation. On the contrary, partisan lines have been effaced, to close up the ranks in patriotic devotion. But factions have grown more menacing and hold their factional designs more necessary than patriotic consecration.

It is characteristic of popular government, and its weakness, that there is more appeal to popularity than concern for the common weal. Too many men in public life are more concerned about ballots than the bulwarks of free institutions. Our growth, our diversification, our Nation-wide communication, our profit-bearing selfishness—these have filled the land with organized factions, not geographical, as Washington so much feared, but commercial, industrial, agricultural, and professional, each seeking to promote the interests of its own, not without justification at times, but often a menace, in exacting privilege or favor through the utterance of political threats. If popular government is to survive it must grant exact justice to all men and fear none. If law is to be respected and government remain supreme, legislation must be for all the people, not for the few of vast fortune or its influences, or the few of commanding activity and their assumptions, or the many who may assert political power in accordance with numerical strength. The Republic is of all the people, equal in their claims to civil liberty and the grant of opportunity, awe, and its righteous rewards. The anxieties of world conflict and the inevitable alterations must not blind us to the tasks of preservation.

If the war is to make of us, or of any national votary of modified democracy, an impotent people, paralyzed by revolutionary reform,

it is not worth the winning. If this world tumult is to leave wrecked hopes like that of chaotic Russia to prove that autocracy and unintelligent democracy have a common infamy, then civilization must have its purification in a penitence of failure and wrecked hopes and unspeakable sacrifices, until God in His mercy and wisdom restores sanity to mankind and admonishes men to achievement over the proven paths of human progress. No thinking man can ignore the changes which war is working. But surely there is a righteous mean between the extremes of the expiring adherents of autocracy and the intoxicated radicals of deceived and demoralized democracy. Let's prove the Republic the highest agency of humanity's just aspirations.

My countrymen, I am not crying out in a wilderness of pessimism. I am uttering a warning that comes of love for the Republic. Let us go on, no matter what betides, to the dependable establishment of our national rights and the safety of our peoples; yes, and the sustained hands of justice among the peoples of the earth. We are no longer able to hold aloof, and the world must be made safe to live in. Let us prove our unity—the common purpose and the unalterable purpose of all Americans to do that, and then let us dedicate ourselves in unity and concord and the same unalterable resolution to the preservation of the inherited Republic. I could utter a prayer for an American benediction, to bestow on us the wisdom, the devotion, the faith, and the willingness to sacrifice, which strengthened the fathers in their mighty tasks. I wish we might dwell in their simplicity and frugality and the freedom from envy which attended. I wish I might end the extravagance of government and of individual life which adds to unrest and rends our strength. It is our besetting sin. We need as much sober thought about what we spend as we need agitation about what we earn in every walk of life. No people shod in \$18 shoes is equipped for the conquering march of civilization.

We do not proclaim ours the perfect Republic, nor yet the ideal popular Government, but we do maintain it is the best and the freest that the world has ever known, and under it mankind has advanced and achieved as under none other since civilization dawned, and in good conscience and consecrated citizenship and abiding faith and high hope we mean, with God's good guidance, to go on to the fulfillment of the highest American destiny.

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